DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 723 SP 040 869

AUTHOR	Passman, Roger; Duran-Klenclo, Peggy
TITLE	Teachers Talking about Change: Reflection as Professional Development.
PUB DATE	2002-04-00
NOTE	21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Change Strategies; Classroom Environment; *Discussion Groups; *Educational Change; Elementary School Students; Elementary School Teachers; *Faculty Development; Grade 4; High Risk Students; Intermediate Grades; *Reflective Teaching; Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Attitudes; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Learner Centered Instruction; *Reflective Thinking; Study Groups; Texas

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed rural Texas teachers commitment to purposeful change through active participation in a teacher study group, the Reflective Practice Discussion Group (RPDG). The RPDG involved focused, rule-governed discussion that examined how to support teachers engaged in purposeful change. The fundamental professional concern of the project was to support teachers through the process of developing student centered learning environments, particularly as related to writing. The project focused on new ways to think about the teaching of writing, in-class modeling of these strategies, and RPDGs. Data were collected from interviews with participating teachers, audiotapes of RPDG sessions, field notes, and student writing. Results indicated that all fourth grade students, particularly those most at risk of failure, made gains in writing during the 2000-01 school year (when teachers were involved in the project). Teachers attitudes toward the teaching and value of writing changed dramatically and positively. They felt that the project helped them to really be teachers. They began to release more responsibility to their students for learning. Students developed more positive attitudes toward writing. The district incorporated time for reflective conversation as part of its ongoing professional development. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 465 723

Running head: TEACHERS TALKING ABOUT CHANGE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Roger Passman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Teachers Talking about Change:

Reflection as Professional Development

Roger Passman

Northeastern Illinois University
College of Education
Teacher Education
5500 N St Louis
Chicago, IL 60625

r-passman@neiu.edu

Peggy Duran-Klenclo

Educational Service Center, Region 17
Lubbock, TX

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 2002

SP040869

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Teachers Talking about Change

Introduction

During the 2000-2001 school year we worked with six teachers in a small rural district in West Texas engaged in a process of purposeful change. The six teachers were part of a larger, whole school initiative developed as a response to low TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) scores. The primary goal of the initiative was to support teachers' efforts as they worked to become more student-centered in their teaching practice, especially in writing, in order to, in part, impact test scores.

While we worked with more than the six teacher participants in this study in the role of consultant to the district, the six teacher participants in this study agreed to expand their own commitment to purposeful change through an active participation in a teacher study group Roger called Reflective Practice Discussion Groups (RPDG). Roger was interested in exploring a model of focused, rule-governed discussion, trying to understand how that might serve to support teachers' engaged in purposeful change. We suspected that the RPDG format might help support teachers as they confronted fundamental notions of teaching and learning and began replacing systems of personal knowledge

(Polanyi, 1962). We wanted to understand something about the process of change supported by the dialectic created in the RPDG format.

Background

The fundamental professional concern of our project was to support a meaningful group of teachers through the process of developing student-centered learning environments. From the beginning, there was a sense among members of the team that teachers and building administrators, as well as ourselves, would have to examine their underlying belief systems vis-à-vis teaching and learning in order to make purposeful changes to their classroom practices. One of the questions we asked ourselves was what might a model of support look like.

Fundamental Theoretical Stance

Our work is centered on a Vygotskian (Vygotsky, 1978) framework that recognizes the social nature of learning and teaching as well as the role played by a coach and mentor in the process of learning. The RPDG itself can be understood as a Zone of Proximal Development in which a more capable peer serves to mentor and guide less capable peers through the process of acquiring new knowledge as a function of making purposeful changes to teaching practice. Teacher growth can also be understood as a social experience where

reflection is used as a means to building a learning community where participants build on each other's experience in the classroom.

The reflective conversation itself is based on the reflective conversation (Carini, 1986) in which participants examine artifacts of teaching in an artificially non-judgmental context. Much like the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1979), participants are encouraged to give voice to tentative understandings thus testing their ideas within a group in an arena of relative safety. Lytle and Cochran-Smith (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Lytle et al., 1994; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992) point out that the reflective conversation is an effective forum for developing a strong base for teachers' creating knowledge.

The RPDG conversation is a necessary part of our work in this West Texas district. It is, however, not sufficient to effect real change in teaching and learning. Reflection must be tied directly to an aggressive program of in-classroom modeling and teaming with participating teachers (Passman, 1999, 2000). Taken together, reflection and a program of aggressive modeling and planning can have a significant impact on changing practice in a school.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study. Data was collected from a variety of sources including interviews with participating teachers, audiotapes and transcripts of the RPDG sessions, field notes, and student writing. All data was analyzed using naturalistic methodologies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Narrative theme analysis (Riessman, 1995) produced a large number of thematic codes that were reduced to larger clusters by employing semiotic cluster analysis (Feldman, 1995) to the thematic codes. All interpretations were subjected to member checks in order to insure a level of verisimilitude as a standard of accuracy. Underlying all interpretation of data is the notion that we best represent through metaphor (Lakoff, 1987) and story (Bruner, 1990).

The Partnership Factor

Peggy's role in our partnership and the progress made as demonstrated by Texas Assessment Scores and Observation of teacher practice and attitudes and student writings.

Background

As education consultant for Region 17 Education Service Center, I am responsible for providing support to and facilitation of regional school districts' efforts to provide quality educational services to their students based

on state and federal standards. My objectives are to assist regional districts in developing and expanding teacher capacity to utilize effective, research-based strategies and to provide student-centered learning experiences in their classrooms. My primary focus is on the provision of functional, quality services to educators so that all of their students, primarily students who are diverse learners, have disabilities, are economically disadvantaged and are at risk for failure, experience academic success and are prepared to meet the challenges of the future. As part of this function, I am required to provide interventional services to districts and/or campuses ranked by the state as low performing based on their scores on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). During the 2000- 2001 school year, one of our regional school districts had an elementary campus that was designated as Low Performing based on the 2000 TAAS scores.

The intervention and assistance cycle was initiated with statewide notice from Texas Education Agency regarding the districts and campuses that were ranked as Low Performing, based on the previous year's TAAS scores (Spring of 2000). Our region had one such campus included on that list. The sole cause of the low performance ranking was a below average TAAS passage rate in fourth grade writing. Of

the twenty-nine (29) fourth grade students taking the writing portion of the TAAS, only 44% of all twenty-nine (29) students passed; only 36.8 % of the nineteen (19) Hispanic students passed; only 31.8% of the twenty-two (22) economically disadvantaged students passed and only 60% of the ten (10) white students passed. Whereas the writing scores the previous year, 1999, were 78.3%, 68.8%, 70.6% and 100% respectively.

Upon notification of the ranking, I placed a call to the district's superintendent to set up a meeting with him and his elementary and high school principals. My first objective was to discuss with them the factors that, in their opinion, contributed to the ranking. Then I wanted to assist them in the development and establishment of a plan of action. During our initial meeting, it was agreed that I would investigate potential solutions that would provide effective remediation of the issues and factors involved based upon the particular needs of the low performing elementary campus. Once I gathered this information, we would convene another meeting to discuss and develop a plan. Both the superintendent and I were adamant that the resolution and approach not be a quick fix, but rather a process by which teachers and staff were provided opportunities to look at their practice and their attitudes

and perceptions toward teaching and student learning. We agreed that although the elementary campus would be our main focal point, some of the intervention activities would include all staff on all campuses. We also determined that students and teachers in second through sixth grades should be the grade levels that would be actively involved in the intervention activities.

As I reflected on the task at hand, I wanted to ensure that I facilitated the district's efforts, by finding a way to provide quality, research-based, ongoing, and sustained training for the district's teachers and staff. Through my experiences the previous summer with the First Grade Reading Academies, brainstorming with co-workers and communicating with my counterparts in the Statewide Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Network, I had made connections with several professors in various Education Departments throughout the Texas University System. Dr. Passman was one such instructor who was affiliated with Texas Tech University. He had been involved in several projects, providing the type of training I was envisioning, in school districts in other regions of the state, thus, I sought his expertise and input.

We met to discuss the issues involved in the situation surrounding the low performance of the campus in

question, the needs of the students and teachers and what the model of support to be proposed to the district's superintendent and administrators would look like. We talked about ways to provide the district with effective services tailored to effectively address the issues involved in the low performance of their elementary students as well as meet their particular needs. We agreed on the importance of providing ongoing, sustained staff development that would focus on: New information and new ways to think about the teaching of writing; In-classroom modeling of these strategies; and Reflective Practice Discussion Groups. I then formulated a plan of action to present to Region 17 Education Service Center's Executive Director, the district's superintendent and the elementary principal.

The plan was to have Roger conduct a one-day introductory workshop for the all the staff in the district - no one was to be excluded - everyone, including Special Education, Title I, Migrant, Bilingual, coaching staff, cafeteria, and maintenance were to take part in that initial training. Then we would schedule Roger for 16 follow-up visits to the elementary campus during which he was to model his strategies in the second through sixth grade classrooms. He would also conduct Reflective Discussion Group sessions during at least 6 of those scheduled visits. A key

component of the Project was to have all second through sixth grade students, including special education and other students (especially those not typically included in the general education classroom during Reading/Language Arts), take part in and be provided with the same opportunities to participate and write during the in-classroom modeling sessions. We wanted these students to have similar opportunities to benefit from Roger's strategies and to demonstrate to their teachers their strengths and ability to become authors.

During the meeting where Roger and I laid out the plan we had developed, Roger wanted to make one thing very clear to the Superintendent and to the elementary principal, he firmly believed that his work with the district would have a positive impact on the teaches and the students, however, he would **not** work with the teachers on 'How' to teach to the test whether it be the TAAS or any other test. He told them that he believed and that research had proven that good teaching will provide students with the experience, knowledge and skills needed to be successful, including being successful at any type test they may be required to take. With this spoken, the room was filled with an uncomfortable silence because for districts and campuses in this situation, performance on the TAAS and increasing

student passage rates ***was*** paramount to its credibility, its funding and its ultimate survival! After a long quiet pause, the Superintendent looked around the room and said that although his school district and campuses, just as all districts and campuses across Texas, tended to be judged solely upon the ranking given it by the State Education Agency based upon student TAAS passage rates and scores, he wanted to offer the children of his district more than a quick band-aid approach to the issues at hand. He agreed with Roger that tests should be utilized to inform instruction, not direct it. As such, the recent TAAS had served to inform the district that it's teachers needed to take a different approach to the teaching of writing and its students needed frequent opportunities to develop their writing skills and knowledge of and experience with communicating through writing. Therefore, he was willing to take a "leap of faith" and accept our proposal.

Through the collaborative efforts of the district, ESC 17 and Roger and after several planning meetings, the details of the Elementary Campus' Writing Project were finalized. The goals of the project were to develop and implement a successful and cohesive, long-term writing program that would enable all students to develop good writing skills and have positive writing experiences.

Roger was set to share with and ask teachers to participate in implementing basic writing techniques and strategies across the curriculum within their prospective classrooms. He assured both the superintendent and the elementary principal that the techniques to be discussed and implemented, the in-classroom modeling for the teachers and the reflective practice discussion groups would not cause confusion for the teachers nor the students. He also assured them that teachers would not be told they had to change their teaching practices "cold turkey". Rather, his strategy was to supply "add on pieces" to the writing puzzle, slowly encouraging a positive change in teacher practices through ongoing modeling and support. He would also provide students with experiences that would demystify writing as a tool for communication in classroom settings as well as during any testing situation.

The elementary principal was to be responsible for setting up and managing the administrative details involved in the scheduling of Roger's classroom sessions and the Reflective Practice Discussion Group sessions. He would work with the fourth grade students and teachers every visit and then, on a rotating basis, model his strategies in the other grade level classrooms. Six teachers agreed to be involved in the reflective practice discussion groups - two

fourth grade teachers, two third grade teachers, one teacher from second, and one teacher from fifth grade. I was responsible for maintaining ongoing data from the project, such as, anecdotal information and observations of teachers and students during the in-class modeling, compiling student writing, conducting intermittent interviews with the teachers, and participating as monitor and transcriber during the Reflective Practice Discussion group sessions.

The Results

As the tables below demonstrate and the overall data reflected, all the fourth grade students made gains in writing during the 2000-2001 school year, especially the subgroups that were most at risk of failure. When comparing the data generated by the 2000 TAAS and the 2001 TAAS, it is quite evident that the fourth grade students tested in 2001 (the students and teachers actively involved in the Writing Project) demonstrated more writing competency than those tested in 2000. In 2001, the TAAS fourth grade writing scores reflected an overall passage rate of 66.7%, compared to a 2000 passage rate of 44.8%, a gain of 21.4%. Fourth grade students in the Hispanic subgroup had an overall passage rate of 70% on the Writing portion of the 2001 TAAS compared to a 2000 passage rate of 36.8% in writing, a gain of 33.2%. The fourth grade students falling in the Low

Socio-Economic subgroup had an overall passage rate of 80% on the Writing portion of the 2001 TAAS compared to a 31.8% passage rate in writing in 2000, a gain of 48.2%!

Lorenzo Elementary School
4th-grade TAAS Writing Scores 2000 and 2001

School District/ Campus	Number Passing 2001 Writing	Number Taking 2001 Writing	Rating % Passing 2001 Writing	Number Passing 2000 Writing	Number Taking 2000 Writing	Rating % Passing 2000 Writing
Lorenzo Elementary	All: 8 AA: 0 H: 7 W: * LSE 8:	All: 12 AA: 0 H: 10 W: 2 LSE 10:	All: 6.7% AA: - * H: 70% W: * LSE 80%	All: 13 AA: 0 H: 7 W: 6 LSE 7:	All: 29 AA: 0 H: 19 W: 10 LSE: 22	All:44.8% AA: - * H: 36.8% W: 60.0% LSE:31.8%

All: All students
AA: African American Students
H: Hispanic Students
W: White Students
LSE: Low Socio-Economic Status
*: Not enough numbers of this particular group to include in data for ranking by the state.

Some Observations

Leadership

The project provided the support and leadership necessary to allow teachers freedom to take risks and room to grow professionally. Our goal from the start was to provide a context in which teachers would be encouraged to take pedagogical risks in order to have a positive impact in

the classroom. There was a strong and visible commitment on the part of the school administration beginning with the superintendent and filtering downward through the principal's office. This translated to a school wide commitment to purposeful change. Roger noted in a field note entry that, "I cannot recall when I have worked in a school with so much visible support."

The project approach was based on a formula that encouraged and supported students by sharing and responding to their success as blossoming/budding authors. The level of support in the classroom translated to strong parental involvement in support of student writing. Together, students and teachers along with the administration planned and implemented the "First Annual Authors' Tea", where all fourth grade students were given an opportunity to formally share their written pieces with an audience comprised of teachers, administrators, school staff, and the community.

Teachers

Teacher attitude changed dramatically. Attitude and perception toward the "teaching of writing" and the value of writing for authentic audiences went through a purposeful metamorphosis. Teachers changed their thinking regarding preconceived notions of student "inability" due to special

education classification and/or minority-economic disadvantaged status.

Additionally, teachers refocused their point of view regarding student expectations and utilization of student-centered, content driven curriculum and strategies rather than test-driven, performance-based curriculum and formulaic strategies.

Students

Overall writing improved, with significant gains observed in the writing of students identified as eligible for special education services and students at risk for failure, as well as gains for students who were Hispanic and for students identified as Economically Disadvantaged. Additionally, there was a noticed improvement in the reading skills of the students participating in this project.

Students developed a positive attitude toward authorship, the self-perception that they were indeed authors. They were more willing and eager to write and share writing with an audience. Students began to realize that writing is an effective and functional tool for communication.

Discussion and Conclusion

The school in which this study took place was classified as a low performing school by the State of Texas. Less that 44 percent of the students taking the fourth grade writing test in 2000 passed. As a result of a strong school wide emphasis on literacy, a strong program of professional development, and a focus on authentic teaching and learning (Lenski, 1998) scores on the TAAS rose in 2001. The reflective conversations were an important factor in the positive changes in teaching and learning in this school.

Carol, a second grade teacher, reported that, "through the reflective sessions, I learned to really be a teacher." The conversations teachers engaged in changed over the course of the year. In the beginning teachers talked of outside pressures, the TAAS, and the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) as imposed from the outside with little or no room for input from teachers. By the middle months the conversation began to change. It became more internal as teachers began to share stories of their own teaching experience. In the final sessions teachers began to understand their positive role in developing curriculum, making classroom changes, and supporting each other across grade levels.

As teacher conversations changed in the RPDG sessions, that change was also reflected in their day-to-day classroom teaching. Participants began to release more responsibility to their students for learning in the classroom. Peer consultation along with teacher guidance became the norm across all grades. The district has incorporated time for reflective conversations to be a part of their ongoing professional development approach for the future. The teacher participants in this study will become the leaders of the new conversations for 2001-2002.

References

Bruner, J. (1990). Acts of meaning. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Carini, P. (1986). Prospect's documentary process. Bennington, VT: The Prospect School Center.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1993). Inside outside: Teacher research and knowledge. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. In A. Iran-Nejad & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), Review of research in education (Vol. 24, pp. 249-305). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Feldman, M. S. (1995). Strategies for interpreting qualitative data. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Habermas, J. (1979). Communication and the evolution of society (T. McCarthy, Trans.). Boston: Beacon Press. (Original published in 1976).

Lakoff, G. (1987). Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lenski, S. D. (1998). Illinois schools that succeed on the IGAP reading test (Reading Task Force Report). Normal, IL: Illinois Reading Council.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lytle, S. L., Christman, J., Cohen, J., Countryman, J., Fecho, B., Portnoy, D., & Sion, F. (1994). Learning in the afternoon: When teacher inquiry meets school reform. In M. Fine (Ed.), Chartering urban school reform: Reflections on public high schools in the midst of change (pp. 157-179). New York: Teachers College Press.

Lytle, S. L., & Cochran-Smith, M. (1992). Teacher research as a way of knowing. Harvard Educational Review, 62(4), 447-474.

Passman, R. (1999). Teachers talking about change: A study of discussion focusing on a developing student-centered practice with four middle-level school teachers. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, National-Louis University, Evanston, IL.

Passman, R. (2000). Reflective practice discussion groups: The impact of focused, rule-governed discussion on teaching and teacher knowledge. Paper presented at the Illinois Reading Council annual meeting, Springfield, IL, March 18.

Polanyi, M. (1962). Personal knowledge: Toward a post-critical philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Riessman, D. (1995). Narrative analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. In M. Cole & V. John-Steiner & S. Scribner & E. Souberman (Eds.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.